NOVA SCOTIA CENTRE
for CRAFT *and* DESIGN

The Mary E. Black Gallery
1683 Barrington Street, Halifax

The Lorenzen Pottery

Ernst and Alma Lorenzen: Contributions to Nova Scotia Craft Since 1949

Curated by Sanchez King

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NOVA SCOTIA
Tourism and Culture

Ernst And Alma Lorenzen: Contributions To Nova Scotia Craft Since 1949

"Just with your hands alone, you can shape clay in any design; any shape you like, and if you have an idea, you try to execute it and, if it is pleasing to you, you finish it and glaze it. It's very much like a person's signature." *Ernst Lorenzen*

The words 'naturalists' and 'pioneers' have been used by many to describe potters Ernst and Alma Lorenzen. For more than half a century, the Lorenzens had created a diverse, yet unmistakable body of work. Ernst and Alma also established relationships with many key members of the craft movement in Nova Scotia during their career. Their home was always open to visitors: art philosopher Dr. Ambrosius Czako, artists Anthony and Jane Law, and pottery teachers Homer Lord (deceased) and Walter Ostrom. Perhaps their most intimate relationship was with Charles Bezanson (known as Brother Thomas). For more than 25 years, a mutual bond of support, encompassing technical, emotional and even spiritual dimensions, existed between the Lorenzens and Brother Thomas. Letters, notes and cards were exchanged, full of glaze ideas, suggestions, results of experiments and encouragement. The Lorenzens were also founding members of the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council.

In 1911 Ernst was born into a family of foresters in Silkeborg, Denmark. In 1930, he moved to Canada to study forestry at the University of New Brunswick. Ernst spent most of the next ten years learning English, studying, and working in the forest industry. While working as a surveyor in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, he met Alma Gauguin, who was studying at Mount St. Bernard College. Born in 1916, Alma was from Cocagne, New Brunswick and was the daughter of a religious painter and gilder. Ernst and Alma married in 1940 and settled in New Brunswick. They had two daughters, Dinamarca and França.

Ernst and Alma started pottery as a hobby in 1945. By 1948 they were making their living from clay. Impressed by the work of Ernst and Alma, Lloyd E. Shaw, owner of Shaw Brick, offered to help them move to Lantz, Nova Scotia and set up a pottery studio. Encouraged by Shaw's generous offer of support and the abundant supply of high quality red clay, the Lorenzens moved in 1949. It was the start of a wonderful relationship between the Lorenzens and the Shaw family. Shaw and his sons, Lloyd R. and Ron, became strong supporters and friends throughout their lifetime.

Ernst and Alma had been making pottery for little more than six years before moving to Nova Scotia and had been working in an artistic vacuum. Initially guided by only a few books on Chinese pottery and one by David Leach, they developed their own style inspired by the character of their adopted province. From the beginning, Ernst and Alma each found their niche. For Ernst it was primarily the wheel. Alma became the sculptor. Yet, they worked as a team. Ernst was not limited to the wheel, and the decoration and glazing efforts were shared. For the most part, a piece of Lorenzen pottery cannot be attributed to one or the other.

In the early 1950s, the Lorenzen's pottery began to take on a new look and attract attention. In 1952 their work was shown at the Rockefeller Center in New York and at the Canadian Handicraft Guild Show. It was during this period that their mutual interest in nature manifested itself in the creation of the first of the Lorenzen mushroom sculptures. Both Ernst and Alma spent considerable time exploring the forests of Nova Scotia. The mushroom sculptures were initially created in 1953 as whimsical and highly stylized pieces, but quickly evolved into popular, botanically accurate works. In 1968, Alma told an interviewer, "We've done about 150 different species of mushroom, and we gather them in the woods and the fields at different times of the year. We also

Stropharia riparia. Earthenware, hand built, polychrome underglaze, n.d. Collection of Barbara Ferguson.

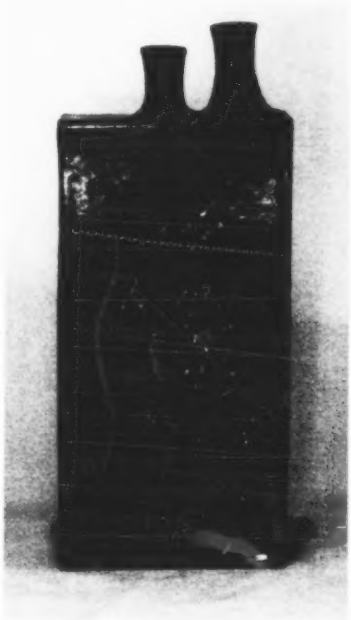
Alma Lorenzen. Signing a piece. C. 1957.

Ernst Lorenzen. Glazing a piece. C. 1957.

Goblet. Porcelain, cobalt decoration, c. 1980. Collection of the Lorenzen family.

Bowl. Stoneware, iron reduction glaze, c.1970. Collection of the late Lloyd and Jean Shaw.

Vase. Porcelain, hand built, manganese and cobalt glaze, c.1970. Collection of the late Lloyd and Jean Shaw.



make a sketch, because we have to be sure of the true colours". 45 years later, 235 different species had been produced.

"You can see the countryside of Nova Scotia in many ways. You can see the colour of the earth, the sky, the water, the trees; but that's only looking at it from the point of view of an artist." *Ernst Lorenzen*

The continued success of Lorenzen pottery encouraged the development of ever-increasing varieties of form and glaze. Both Ernst and Alma had an insatiable curiosity and spent considerable time exploring the province, looking for clay and minerals. This lead to a working partnership characterized by innovation and experimentation. This is best illustrated by Ernst and Alma's almost adventurous quest for new glazes. Over a period of three decades, hundreds of glazes were developed and tested. Glaze ingredients came from every corner of the province. They collected galena from Walton, silica from Dutch Settlement, lava from Cape d'Or, near Advocate, to name a few. Ernst, a private pilot, was also known to have flown out to Sable Island to collect sand for his garnet sand glaze. In the mid 1980s, even a gift of fresh volcanic ash from Mount Saint Helen's resulted in a glaze.

Lorenzen Pottery continued to appear in exhibitions including one at the National Gallery of Canada in 1957 and the Canadian Ceramics shows of 1959, 1961, and 1963. Success on the international stage came in the form of participation in the German Industries Fair in Berlin of 1964, and the International Arts and Crafts Fair in Florence, Italy in 1965.

Until the mid 1960s, Ernst and Alma worked exclusively in low-fire earthenware. After the addition of a gas kiln (built by local potter Tim Worthington), the couple began to work in stoneware and porcelain. In 1965, Ernst received a Canada Council grant to study pottery production methods in Denmark and to further explore the suitability of local Nova Scotian ores and minerals for glaze development. At EXPO 67, their work appeared in both the Maritime and Canadian pavilions.

Throughout the 1970s, the Lorenzens arguably reached their peak in terms of skill and quality. By 1985, poor health had affected Ernst's abilities. He stopped working in 1987 and died in 1990. Alma continued to work with her daughter Dinamarca, sculpting the mushrooms up until her death in 1998. Since then, Dinamarca Lorenzen has continued the family tradition.

Even though Ernst and Alma were unassuming people, their passionate work was a valuable inspiration to the craft movement; a subtle form of leadership by example. During their first 20 years in Nova Scotia, the Lorenzens became "craft ambassadors" for their province. Their work was shown throughout North America and Europe, demonstrating to both their peers and budding potters that studio potters in Nova Scotia could make a living and gain international recognition. Even with such recognition, Ernst and Alma remained true to their artistic vision and to the inspiration they derived from their surroundings.

Sanchez King
Curator
October 2002

Sanchez King is a graduate of Mount Saint Vincent University and is the grandson of Alma and Ernst Lorenzen. He had the fortune to have studied pottery with his grandmother and mother.

List of Work in the Exhibition

1. **Vase**. Earthenware, Lantz clay slip, 1957. Collection of the Elmsdale Public Library. 2. **Creamer Set**. Earthenware, under glazed thistle design, c. 1950. Collection of Stephen Sampson. 3. **Bowl**. Earthenware, oxblood glaze, c. 1950. Collection of Stephen Sampson. 4. **Bowl**. Porcelain, tenmoku and copper reduction glazes, c. 1980. Collection of Stephen Sampson. 5. **Bottle**. Earthenware, Chinese red glaze, n.d. Collection of Stephen Sampson. 6. **Cup and Saucer**. Earthenware, Chinese red glaze, n.d. Collection of Stephen Sampson. 7. **Pitcher**. Earthenware, garnet sand glaze, n.d. Collection of Stephen Sampson. 8. **Vase**. Earthenware, incised with opalescent blue glaze, n.d. Collection of Alvin and Charity Slaunwhite. 9. **Vase**. Porcelain, copper reduction glaze, c.1980. Collection of Alvin and Charity Slaunwhite. 10. **Vase**. Earthenware, olive glaze, n.d. Collection of Alvin and Charity Slaunwhite. 11. **Bowl**. Earthenware, opalescent blue glaze, n.d. Collection of Alvin and Charity Slaunwhite. 12. **Ashtray**. Earthenware, Mount St. Helen's Ash glaze, c. 1982. Collection of Stephen Sampson. 13. **Amanita phalloides**. Earthenware, hand built, polychrome underglaze, n.d. Collection of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. 14. **Craterellus lutescens**. Earthenware, hand built, polychrome underglaze, n.d. Collection of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. 15. **Morchella angusticeps**. Earthenware, hand built, polychrome underglaze, n.d. Collection of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. 16. **Pleurotus serotinus**. Earthenware, hand built, polychrome underglaze, n.d. Collection of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. 17. **Hygrophorus conicus**. Earthenware, hand built, polychrome underglaze, n.d.Collection of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. 18. **Stropharia riparia**. Earthenware, hand built, polychrome underglaze, n.d. Collection of Barbara Ferguson. 19. **Plate**. Stoneware, cobalt glaze, c.1970. Private collection. 20. **Decanter**. Porcelain, tenmoku glaze, c.1975. Collection of the late Lloyd and Jean Shaw. 21. **Vase**. Stoneware, iron and copper reduction glaze, 1969. Collection of the late Lloyd and Jean Shaw. 22. **Bowl**. Stoneware, iron reduction glaze, c.1970. Collection of the late Lloyd and Jean Shaw. 23. **Vase**. Porcelain, hand built, manganese and cobalt glaze, c.1970. Collection of the late Lloyd and Jean Shaw. 24. **Tray**. Stoneware, peacock glaze, c.1973. Collection of the late Lloyd and Jean Shaw. 25. **Bird**. Earthenware, polychrome underglaze, n.d. Collection of Alex Wilson. 26. **Bowl**. Earthenware, dragon's blood glaze, n.d. Collection of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. 27. **Vase**. Stoneware, n.d. Collection of the Nova Scotia Art Bank. 28. **Bowl**. Porcelain, polychrome glaze, n.d. Collection of the Nova Scotia Art Bank. 29. **Vase**. Stoneware, tenmoku glaze, c. 1970. Collection of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. 30. **Bottle**. Stoneware, tin with iron underglaze, c. 1977. Collection of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. 31. **Vase, hexahedron**. Stoneware, hand built, blue crater glaze, 1970. Collection of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. 32. **Tray**. Stoneware, sprig decorated, yellow crater glaze, c. 1977. Collection of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. 33. **Bowl**. Stoneware, copper glaze, 1973. Collection of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. 34. **Bud Vase**. Stoneware, peacock glaze, c. 1973. Collection of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. 35. **Vase**. Stoneware, sprig decorated, cobalt glaze, c. 1977. Collection of Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. 36. **Covered Urn**. Stoneware, crater glaze, 1967. Collection of the Lorenzen family. 37. **Sculpture**. Stoneware, hand built, yellow crater glaze, c. 1970. Collection of the Lorenzen family. 38. **Bottle with Stand**. Earthenware, n.d. Collection of the Lorenzen family. 39. **Goblet**. Porcelain, cobalt decoration, c. 1980. Collection of the Lorenzen family. 40. **Bracelet and Ring**. Earthenware, Chinese red glaze (silverwork by Baroness Wtewaal), n.d. Collection of the Lorenzen family. 41. **Pendant**. Porcelain, iron glaze, c. 1989. Collection of the Lorenzen family.